



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Foreign Affairs and Aid Subcommittee – Inquiry into the role of Australia's
international development program in preventing conflict

February 11, 2026

International Development Contractors Community (IDCC)

Contact: Nathan Hansford, Chief Executive Officer [REDACTED]



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

IDCC welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (Foreign Affairs and Aid Subcommittee) inquiry into the role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict.

IDCC's submission focuses on practical delivery considerations relevant to the Terms of Reference, including the contribution contractors and consultants make within DFAT's broader partner mix.

1. About the International Development Contractors Community

IDCC is the peak body representing international development consultants and contractors working with Australia's official development assistance and broader development programming. IDCC's membership includes individuals, small and medium enterprises and larger firms that provide program management, technical assistance, research and evaluation, and specialist advisory services amongst other services across the Indo-Pacific.

IDCC members work alongside partner governments, civil society organisations, multilateral organisations, the private sector and other delivery partners to design and deliver complex development initiatives, including long-term governance and service delivery programs, technical assistance, program management and delivery systems, research and analysis, and monitoring, evaluation and learning.

IDCC's purpose in making this submission is to assist the Committee to understand how Australia's development program contributes to resilience and conflict prevention in practice, by illustrating the delivery role that contractors play in implementing Australian Government priorities.

Scope of this submission

As the peak body for international development contractors working with the Australian aid program, IDCC has consolidated input across our membership. This submission draws on implementation examples that may also be reflected—often in greater detail—in individual submissions from IDCC member organisations.

Where examples are referenced in this submission, initiatives are named without naming implementers. IDCC can facilitate the participation of relevant representatives in any further engagement if the Committee finds that useful, including at public hearings. Member identities can be provided on request, and additional examples can be supplied if helpful.

IDCC would be pleased to appear before the Committee at any public hearings and, if appropriate, can bring together representatives from IDCC member organisations to provide further implementation-focused evidence.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

2. Executive summary

Key messages

- Australia's international development program contributes to preventing conflict by reducing the drivers of fragility and violence, strengthening inclusive institutions, and building trusted mechanisms for resolving grievances peacefully.
- Prevention outcomes are strengthened when Australia uses a mix of partners and instruments and selects delivery arrangements on comparative advantage, risk and context.
- Early identification and mitigation of conflict risks depends on credible local insights, monitoring, evaluation and learning, and connections across development, diplomacy and security actors.
- Australia's development program is strongest when it draws on the strengths of different partner types—partner governments, civil society organisations, multilateral organisations, contractors and the private sector—selected to suit the context and comparative advantage.
- Contractors and consultants are a core delivery partner within Australia's aid portfolio. They add value by enabling safe delivery at scale in complex environments, providing specialist capability, and supporting locally led delivery through grant and partnership mechanisms with strong fiduciary and safeguarding systems. Contractors work through and with partner governments, civil society and local organisations.
- The recommendations below focus on practical steps Australia that can strengthen outcomes for Australia and our regional neighbours.

3. IDCC Recommendations

Overarching recommendation (whole-of-government coherence)

Australia gets the best results when our development work lines up with our broader engagement in a country. In fragile places, that means making sure aid is planned and delivered with a clear understanding of what our diplomats and security partners are doing too, so everyone is pulling in the same direction.

R1. Strengthen a “One Australia” approach in priority fragile contexts by aligning development programming with diplomatic and security engagement through shared analysis, joint objectives where appropriate, and clear coordination arrangements—so development's preventive impact complements broader Australian engagement.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

Policy and strategic direction

DFAT's policy and planning settings already recognise the value of resilience and stability. This inquiry provides an opportunity to make conflict sensitivity more explicit and consistent in country and regional plans, so country and regional programs consistently consider whether they are reducing tensions, building trust and strengthening resilience.

R2. Strengthen policy direction: Incorporate conflict prevention and conflict sensitivity as a cross-cutting priority within DFAT's country and regional programming, with risk-proportionate analysis updated through delivery.

R3. Reduce key drivers of instability: Use Australia's aid program to reduce structural drivers of instability in the Indo-Pacific, including climate, food, water and energy insecurity, and exclusion from services and opportunity.

Programming choices in fragile and contested settings

Conflict usually grows out of long-running problems: weak services, unfair access to jobs and resources, exclusion, and loss of trust in institutions. Australia's aid can reduce these risks by backing locally led solutions, having flexible tools to respond early when tensions rise, and supporting practical benefits for communities as well as longer-term reforms.

R4. Back locally led resilience: Invest in long-term locally led approaches that strengthen inclusive institutions, community participation and human capital in fragile and contested settings, including through locally anchored partners.

R5. Enable early action: Expand flexible, prevention-focused instruments (e.g., small grants, rapid response windows and surge technical assistance) so Australia can address emerging local grievances before they escalate.

R6. Deliver peace dividends and reform: Prioritise programming in pre- and post-conflict contexts that delivers practical "peace dividends" (trusted services, livelihoods and dispute resolution) alongside institutional reform, accountability and protection.

Delivery settings that make prevention work

Good intent is not enough—delivery settings determine whether prevention happens. DFAT needs the right mix of partners, contracts that reward quality and safe delivery, and strong safeguards and financial controls, especially in high-risk environments. These settings are also where contractors can add value: managing risk, bringing specialist capability, and enabling local partners to deliver safely.

R7. Improve early warning and decision support: Invest in evidence, monitoring and early warning that informs decisions, including a standing capability that synthesises data and partner insights to support early identification and mitigation.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

R8. Use the right partners for the job: Maintain a balanced mix of delivery partners and instruments (partner governments, civil society organisations, multilateral organisations, contractors and the private sector), selected on comparative advantage, risk and context.

R9. Procure for quality and safe delivery: Set procurement and contracting arrangements that reward quality, collaboration, safeguarding and learning, and enable adaptive delivery and local partnerships where this improves outcomes.

R10. Protect people and public money: Apply consistent duty of care, safeguarding and fiduciary standards across delivery settings so partners can operate safely and credibly in high-risk environments.

R11. Strengthen commissioning settings: Continue strengthening DFAT guidance, staff capability and contracting tools to commission and manage conflict-sensitive programs—so delivery partners can meet clear expectations on risk, safeguards, learning and prevention outcomes.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

4. How Australia's aid program contributes to preventing conflict — and the delivery role contractors play

Australia's development investments contribute to conflict prevention when they reduce exclusion, strengthen legitimacy and trust in public systems, and help communities and institutions manage contestation without violence. In practice, this is often achieved through long-term work on governance, inclusion, service access, livelihoods and climate resilience, supported by evidence and learning that informs decisions over time.

Contractors and consultants support these outcomes by combining technical capability with delivery systems. They commonly manage complex portfolios, operate grant and partnership facilities, and provide surge expertise to government and local partners. This enables DFAT to deliver at scale and at pace, while maintaining duty of care, safeguarding and fiduciary assurance in higher-risk contexts.

What contractors and consultants commonly contribute

- Delivery assurance in complex environments: program management systems, duty of care, safeguarding and risk controls that allow DFAT to deliver at scale where operating conditions are volatile.
- Specialist capability: advisory and technical expertise across governance and public financial management, inclusion, climate adaptation, community engagement and service delivery systems amongst others.
- Locally led delivery enablement: designing and managing grant facilities and partnerships that support local organisations with appropriate fiduciary oversight, safeguarding and learning.
- Evidence, learning and early warning: monitoring, evaluation and analytical capability that strengthens situational awareness, supports early identification of risks, and informs decisions.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

5. IDCC Responses to the Terms of Reference

Terms of reference 1

The role of Australia's international development program in building resilience in fragile states, including by strengthening community and civic participation, governance, security reform and human capital.

Key points

- In fragile settings, conflict risk often escalates where people lack credible ways to raise concerns, services are uneven, or local disputes are not managed through trusted institutions. Strengthening participation and accountability can reduce those risks.
- Inclusive governance and public financial management can stabilise service delivery and reduce grievance drivers linked to fiscal stress and uneven allocation decisions.
- Human capital investments (education, health, skills) contribute to resilience when delivered through systems that are accessible, inclusive and trusted by communities.

Australia's development program contributes to resilience by addressing structural drivers of instability—exclusion, weak institutions, limited service delivery, inequality and low economic opportunity. Effective resilience-building is multi-dimensional: it strengthens state capability and legitimacy while supporting community cohesion and locally led solutions.

What this means in practice (delivery)

Community and civic participation

Participation and accountable governance can reduce the risk of disputes escalating into violence. Delivery partners, including contractors, often support this by establishing community engagement platforms, enabling access to small grants, strengthening local organisations, and linking community evidence to government decision-making.

IDCC implementation example: Building Community Engagement Program (Papua New Guinea) — long-term support to community engagement platforms and local leaders in fragile areas to strengthen civic participation, service access and constructive problem-solving. In practice, this reduces conflict risk by creating trusted channels for communities to raise concerns, resolve disputes and link local evidence to decision-makers. This includes structured engagement on sorcery accusation-related violence in the Papua New Guinea Highlands, using dialogue and evidence to connect frontline advocates with national decision-makers and strengthen protective and accountability responses.

Governance and service delivery

Strengthening governance and service delivery reduces grievances and supports peaceful dispute resolution. Contractors often provide long-term technical assistance and program management to support reforms in public financial management, policy development and accountability systems, frequently alongside local institutions and civil society organisations.

IDCC implementation example: PARTISIPA – Partnership to Strengthen Village Development and Municipal Administration (Timor-Leste) — strengthening village development and municipal



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

administration systems, including community-led prioritisation of infrastructure and services. Transparent, locally owned decisions can strengthen trust in institutions and reduce perceptions of unfairness that can fuel unrest.

IDCC implementation example: Tonga Australia Support Platform (Tonga) — embedded support to public financial management modernisation to improve transparency, budget credibility and service delivery, reducing fiscal stress and grievance risk. Stronger public financial management supports more predictable services and fairer allocation decisions, reducing grievance drivers.

Rule of law, justice and security reform

Rule of law and justice systems influence whether disputes are resolved peacefully or escalate. Development programming can support prevention by improving access to justice, strengthening accountability and oversight, and supporting community safety approaches—complementing, rather than substituting for, policing and security responses.

Human capital and inclusive development

Education, health and social protection strengthen resilience by reducing inequality and expanding opportunity, particularly for marginalised groups. Delivery partners, including contractors, support this by strengthening service delivery systems, supporting inclusive policy design, and embedding safeguarding.

IDCC implementation example: INKLUSI / Australia–Indonesia Partnership Towards an Inclusive Society (Indonesia) — strengthening participation, protection and services for marginalised groups through civil society and government collaboration. Reducing exclusion and improving institutional responsiveness supports longer-term social cohesion and lowers tensions linked to marginalisation.

Climate and disaster resilience as conflict prevention

Climate shocks, resource scarcity and displacement can amplify fragility. ODA investments that strengthen food, water and energy security, disaster preparedness, and climate-resilient infrastructure can reduce competition over scarce resources and mitigate pressures that contribute to instability.

IDCC implementation example: Climate Resilient Communities (regional) — integrating climate adaptation with development programming to reduce resource stress (food, water and energy) that can amplify local tensions. Reducing climate-related stressors can lower the risk of disputes escalating where services and institutions are already under strain.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

Terms of reference 2

The strategic use of Australia's international development program to prevent conflict in the Indo-Pacific.

Key points

- Strategic conflict prevention requires focusing development investments on structural drivers of instability across the Indo-Pacific, including climate and resource stress, exclusion, weak institutions and uneven opportunity.
- Strategic use is strengthened when Australia co-designs with regional partners and uses delivery approaches that match context—combining long-term institution-building with flexible mechanisms where risks are emerging.
- Government-to-government cooperation and regional linkages can strengthen norms, systems and institutional capability in ways that reduce risks over time.

Australia's development program is most strategically effective when it is planned as part of Australia's broader engagement in the Indo-Pacific and grounded in long-term relationships with regional partners—so investments are consistent over time and aligned to shared priorities for stability and prosperity.

What this means in practice (delivery)

Target drivers and hotspots with the right mix of tools

From a delivery perspective, strategic use means (a) targeting known drivers of conflict and instability, informed by regularly updated analysis, and (b) maintaining sustained engagement in priority countries and subnational hotspots through locally anchored delivery networks.

Build institutional capability and legitimacy

Development programming can support prevention by strengthening institutions that deliver services fairly, manage resources transparently and respond to citizen concerns—alongside support for civic participation and accountability.

Strengthen regional cooperation

Regional programs can strengthen cooperation and resilience by building practical linkages between institutions, supporting shared standards and enabling coordinated responses to emerging risks.

Delivery role of contractors (as part of the partner mix)

Contractors can contribute to strategic effect by enabling DFAT to mobilise and manage multi-country and multi-sector investments, maintain delivery continuity in volatile contexts, and provide governance and risk management systems that support safe delivery through local partners.

IDCC implementation examples:

INKLUSI / Australia–Indonesia Partnership Towards an Inclusive Society (Indonesia) — inclusion and access to services as a foundation for social cohesion.

Reducing exclusion lowers a common driver of tension and builds trust in institutions over time.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

Southeast Asia Governance to Governance (regional) — practical government-to-government linkages that strengthen institutions and cooperation across the Indo-Pacific.

Stronger institutional capability and cooperation can reduce longer-term governance and integrity risks that contribute to instability.

Climate Resilient Communities (regional) — linking climate adaptation to development programming to reduce resource stress.

Climate and resource pressures can amplify local tensions; integrated approaches help prevent escalation.

Terms of reference 3

Options for effective support through Australia's aid program in pre-conflict and/or post-conflict zones.

Key points

- In pre-conflict settings, prevention is most effective when Australia can act early: support local dispute resolution, reduce acute stressors and address exclusion before violence escalates.
- In post-conflict settings, programming should combine early “peace dividends” with longer-term institutional reform and accountability so gains are durable.
- Flexibility matters: DFAT needs mechanisms that can surge expertise, adjust to changing conditions and safely partner with local actors.

Pre-conflict and post-conflict environments require flexible, conflict-sensitive approaches that can adapt to rapidly changing conditions. Options for effective support include staged approaches across prevention, stabilisation and recovery, and delivery modalities that can manage heightened risks while supporting local ownership.

What this means in practice (delivery)

Pre-conflict settings (act early)

- Use flexible, locally led programming to address emerging grievances (land and resource disputes, service gaps, electoral tensions) before they escalate.
- Use rapid response mechanisms (small grants windows and surge technical assistance) that can activate quickly based on local triggers and early warning.
- Support locally trusted dispute-resolution and dialogue mechanisms that bring together traditional and emerging leaders, women’s groups, youth and other community actors.
- Combine climate adaptation, livelihoods and governance support where resource stress is contributing to tension.

Post-conflict settings (stabilise and rebuild)

- Deliver visible “peace dividends”: restoring essential services, supporting trauma-aware education and health, and creating jobs and livelihood pathways for conflict-affected communities.
- Rebuild local institutions (including justice and local government) alongside reconciliation and social cohesion initiatives.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

- Apply strong safeguarding, fiduciary controls and risk management to enable delivery where diversion and violence risks are elevated, while planning for a gradual transition to local ownership.

IDCC implementation examples:

Building Community Engagement Program (Papua New Guinea) — structured community engagement and locally grounded problem-solving in fragile areas.

Provides a model of early, locally anchored action where service gaps and grievances can escalate.

PARTISIPA (Timor-Leste) — community-led prioritisation and local development systems. Strengthens local legitimacy and reduces perceptions of unfairness, supporting stabilisation and recovery.

INKLUSI (Indonesia) — inclusion and protection for marginalised groups through civil society government collaboration.

Reduces exclusion-based grievances that can intensify in fragile or contested environments.

International comparator (not DFAT-funded): XCEPT (United Kingdom) — rapid, decision-relevant analysis using mixed methods and open-source approaches.

Illustrates how structured research-to-policy capability can support earlier prevention and recovery choices—if linked to clear decision points and flexible instruments.

Terms of reference 4

The impact of international development in the maintenance of peace and prevention of conflict, including for early identification and mitigation of conflict.

Key points

- Development's contribution to peace is often indirect and realised over time. Clear theories of change, conflict-sensitive monitoring and credible learning loops help Australia understand what is working and adjust earlier.
- Early identification and mitigation is strengthened when local partner insights are combined with structured analysis and data, and when that evidence triggers practical options (not just reporting).
- Transparent communication of outcomes supports legitimacy and reduces space for misinformation and competing narratives about Australia's intent.

Development investments contribute to peace and conflict prevention by strengthening social cohesion and the legitimacy of institutions over time. These impacts are often multi-causal, so they are harder to measure and communicate unless built into program design and monitoring.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

What this means in practice (delivery)

Capturing and communicating prevention outcomes

- Make conflict prevention outcomes explicit within investment theories of change, including where prevention is a secondary outcome of governance, inclusion, education or climate investments.
- Integrate conflict-sensitive indicators into monitoring, evaluation and learning, and use adaptive management to respond to emerging risks.
- Strengthen learning loops between program monitoring, DFAT country teams and whole-of-government decision-makers so ODA can function as an early warning and insight system.

Early warning and mitigation

Early identification and mitigation depends on credible local insights, data and analysis, combined with delivery systems that can respond. Contractors can contribute by establishing monitoring and risk systems across dispersed geographies, supporting third-party monitoring where needed, and maintaining networks with local partners who can report changes in context. Where Australia invests in early warning (for example on food insecurity, disaster risk or atrocity prevention), this is most effective when linked to clear decision pathways and flexible instruments so early warning translates into early action.

IDCC implementation examples:

INKLUSI (Indonesia) — demonstrates how program learning, local partner networks and evidence can inform policy and service improvements.

Shows how inclusion-focused programming can generate decision-relevant insights on grievances and institutional responsiveness.

International comparator (not DFAT-funded): XCEPT (United Kingdom) — structured conflict and security research supporting situational awareness.

Illustrates how analysis can be packaged for decision-makers to support earlier prevention choices.

International comparator (not DFAT-funded): FEWS NET — structured food security early warning model.

Shows how early warning can support earlier action if decision pathways and flexible instruments are in place.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

Terms of reference 5

Any related matters.

IDCC has no additional matters to raise beyond the Terms of Reference above but would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence if helpful.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

Annex A: IDCC implementation examples referenced in this submission

The examples below summarise briefly some of the IDCC member examples used in the Terms of Reference responses to illustrate delivery practice. Consistent with IDCC's intent to provide a sector-wide synthesis, initiatives are named **without naming implementers**. Some examples may overlap with initiatives referenced in submissions from individual IDCC members. IDCC Members can provide many more examples should the Committee be interested in further evidence.

DFAT-supported / Australia-funded initiatives (aid program examples)

IDCC implementation example 1: Building Community Engagement Program (Papua New Guinea)

Long-term support to community engagement platforms and local leaders in fragile areas to strengthen civic participation, service access and constructive problem-solving. *This includes structured engagement on sorcery accusation-related violence in the Papua New Guinea Highlands, using dialogue and evidence to connect frontline advocates with national decision-makers and strengthen protective and accountability responses.*

IDCC implementation example 2: PARTISIPA – Partnership to Strengthen Village Development and Municipal Administration (Timor-Leste)

Strengthening village development and municipal administration systems, including community-led prioritisation of infrastructure and services.

IDCC implementation example 3: Tonga Australia Support Platform (Tonga)

Embedded support to public financial management modernisation to improve transparency, budget credibility and service delivery, reducing fiscal stress and grievance risk.

IDCC implementation example 4: INKLUSI / Australia–Indonesia Partnership Towards an Inclusive Society (Indonesia)

Strengthening participation, protection and services for marginalised groups through civil society and government collaboration.

IDCC implementation example 5: Southeast Asia Governance to Governance (regional)

Practical government-to-government linkages (for example, regulatory and public finance reform) that strengthen institutions and cooperation across the Indo-Pacific.

IDCC implementation example 6: Climate Resilient Communities (regional)

Integrating climate adaptation with development programming to reduce resource stress (food, water and energy) that can amplify local tensions.



Australia's International Development Contractors Community

Annex B: International comparators referenced (not DFAT-funded)

The examples below are **not DFAT-funded**. They are included because IDCC members have identified them as established overseas models that demonstrate approaches Australia could consider adapting or procuring, where appropriate.

International comparator 1: XCEPT (United Kingdom)

A conflict, environment and security research platform using mixed methods and open-source approaches to strengthen situational awareness and inform prevention.

International comparator 2: FEWS NET

A long-running early warning model for food security, illustrating how structured analysis can inform early action and risk mitigation.